Intellectual and Cultural Leaders of Minnesota: Oral History Project 2013-14

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Interviewee: Will Weaver
Fiction Writer

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Will Weaver: I have always said that there is no one path to being a writer. It may be that one grows up in a family of writers, or grows up in a family of musicians or grows up in a family of farmers. With me, it was the latter case. I never had any idea that I would become a writer. I often present that point when I visit schools and talk to students. We have a good discussion about how we make our own path in the world. It might be helpful to grow up in a family of writers to become a writer, but it is not a requirement. In my case, it was a small dairy farm up in northern Minnesota. In high school, I think, for all of us, there’s one or two teachers who are pivotal and truly change our lives, and, in this case, it was an English teacher and a baseball coach, Mr. Anderson. I came to think a lot about the kind of man he was. He was a former athlete, a good coach, a good player, but he also loved English, he loved literature, and I thought, “That’s the kind of man that I admire.” I think it wasn’t explicit that that was the kind of man I wanted to be, but it had its effect on me: Mr. Anderson.

Then off to the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, where I was – as I would later write a story – an undeclared major, finding my way. I take some pleasure in being, as you might say, pre-creative-writing-class era. I took only literature classes, read the greats, read the moderns, but didn’t do any creative writing. It was early stages then, in the late ’60s and early ’70s.

Then, off to California, carrying my bachelor’s degree, which is light luggage, I like to joke, but it has served me very well. I felt I needed to get away from Minnesota and, if there is one thing I would recommend to young people, it is that as well, to somehow get away from wherever you grew up, get some distance, get some perspective on how we grew up as well. When I do school visits and talk to young people, I talk about the matter of the luck of the draw – our parents, in particular. Sometimes, we’ve drawn high cards, and sometimes we’ve drawn hardly any cards at all. We can’t change that aspect of our lives and so that’s something we have to figure out how to deal with. In my case, I didn’t grow up in a family with a library. We had books, but they were few and far between, and so, again, being a literary guy was the farthest thing from my mind and, I’m certain, my parents’ mind as well. It was this background that took me to California, where I rattled around for a couple of years but had this overwhelming desire to write something, to express myself. I think that’s part and parcel of getting away, getting some distance on how we grew up and where we grew up, and then maybe trying to make sense of it all through writing. It could be through song, it could be through poetry, it could be through short stories. And it was through short stories that I got started writing. I think it’s a great place to begin – rather than trying to write a big novel, why not something smaller and manageable? The short story is exactly that kind of form; I highly recommend it.

I wrote a couple of short stories about growing up in the Midwest, in particular one about deer hunting with grandfather and uncles and cousins, the whole family, and it was that particular story I think that got me into the Stanford writing program, because, as I like to joke, I don’t think they’d seen any stories about deer hunting – a lot of urban stories, a lot of relationship stories, but very few about deer hunting. It was forward from there, learning finally the craft of writing, in some ways teaching myself to write. We can hear
all the lectures, we can read all the books on the techniques of writing, but at some point, we really do have to teach ourselves, that is, the sentence-by-sentence writing that goes forward draft-by-draft. At some point, we have to take that writing and lay it alongside a page of a writer we admire, a published writer, a famous writer. We take our writing, we lay it directly alongside of that other writer’s page, and we look at it and we ask, “Why is that other writer’s writing so much better than mine? Why doesn’t mine measure up? Why doesn’t it come alive on the page?” It’s a very instructive thing to do that. So <in> classes at Stanford in the MFA program, <I was> working with other young writers, along with well-know mentor kind of writers. Raymond Carver was there; I got to know him a bit. I just missed Wallace Stegner; he had retired just a couple of years earlier. And then, we have to leave. Being in graduate school is fun and exciting, but at some point we have to leave the cocoon, go back to the real world, and start writing. For me, that meant a return to the Midwest where I’d grown up, but with that perspective now, that having been away time. That served me very well.

**Material:** I would certainly ask you, if you are an emerging writer, a would-be writer, to think about the material in your life that you might have overlooked, that is so close to you that you are not seeing it. For me, it was some of the stories of small town farming life, family issues, and certainly aspects of the land. The land has a profound effect on me, growing up on a farm, working it, hunting on it, hiking it, knowing it intimately. Some of my short stories began to focus on that aspect that, again, was so close to me, part of my growing up. It was embedded in my experience, this intimate relationship with the land, with nature. Some of those stories were hunting stories. Some were farming stories.

One story I like in particular is called “Dispersal,” a very short little story, which I’ll also say, and I’m speaking shortness here, is a hard thing to achieve. When we write short stories, by nature, we need to keep them short. It’s a challenge. Can you write something significant in just a few pages? I’ll tell you, this is the hardest part of writing, in terms of the craft. A good short story, well-turned short story, is a real joy to finish. One of those stories, “Dispersal,” was about a farm auction. I attended several, particularly during those dark days in the late ’70s and early ’80s in the Midwest – all the farm foreclosures. And some of the saddest things to happen were farm auctions; they were billed as “dispersals,” that is, everything goes. Even the farm in the end would be sold – probably a bank-owned sale. So I remember attending one of those dispersal auctions with my father and feeling, maybe for the first time, the great sadness permeating that auction, all the people there picking through the farmer’s things, all of which had to be sold, and trying to make sense of that in writing. I tried to craft that into a short story.

The best short stories, the best novels, maybe the best plays, have what I call a moral dilemma, a real dilemma at the heart of it that is, ideally, almost life and death. The stakes are high, even in a short story. In this case, a neighboring farmer goes to the site of this commercial auction. He knows the man. He has his eye on an implement. He ends up buying it for, as he says, “a steal.” “I got a steal,” he says – a little extra meaning there: in some ways, he has stolen that implement, and he doesn’t feel good about it. He doesn’t feel good about it at all. These dilemmas – that one just coming out of a farm auction –
surround us. As writers, we have to be attuned to them, collect them, and then work them, work them into shape, into a story that other people will recognize. Yes, this may be our particular experience – attending an auction, visiting a hospital, whatever – but it’s our job as writers to craft that into narrative form: a beginning, a middle, an end. It sounds simple, but it isn’t really, but it can be done, once we learn the techniques of writing.

For me, it was from the short story onward and upward into the novel. Red Earth, White Earth, my first novel, came out in 1986, and was a surprising hit in some ways, not a national best seller, certainly a regional best seller. There was a television movie made of it, I’m sorry to say not a very good one, but that can happen. It was a story about land and who owns the land. In this case, if focused on the large White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota and ownership: land set aside for the Ojibway, but land that had passed, over 90% of it, into the hands of white farmers and resort owners. One of those farmers was my grandfather, who lived within the boundaries of the White Earth Reservation. And so this became a true dilemma, in a nutshell. The Native Americans wanted the land back. My grandfather certainly didn’t want to give it back, but he was a thoughtful man and he understood the claim on the land. Land claims issues: that was an important part of the rise of the American Indian Movement, AIM, in the late ’70s and early ’80s, and a very traumatic period in the Midwest. For me, again, material, to write this story, this family story: it turned into, not a short story this time, but a novel.

Eventually, wanting to write the next great American novel, I became greatly frustrated, as can happen. When we make big plans, sometimes we create big obstacles and blocks for ourselves. So I turned to writing something I had never imagined: narratives for younger readers. I had kids of my own by then, a couple of children, and especially watching my son, and seeing what he read or didn’t read – although my kids are good readers, and they were sort of destined to be good readers perhaps, having two English teachers as parents – but my son’s friends on the baseball teams or the basketball teams, watching what they read or didn’t read, mostly didn’t read, and then seeing the rise of first video games, Nintendo, Sega Genesis, those almost ancient words now, that first generation: I could see the profound effect. I could anticipate the stronger and stronger effect of those, the popularity of those – and sure enough! So, a sports novel called Striking Out, small town, baseball, farm life, nothing new or different about the plot: a farm kid’s a good baseball player. He lands a spot on the town team. The town team kids don’t like him all that much, because he’s going to take one of their spots, and so on – that story. Again, our stories don’t have to be completely creative. It’s been said by a lot of people there are only a few stories being told over and over and over again. And in some ways I believe that. But it’s up to us to find a new way to tell that story. And so here was my character, Billy Baggs, a flamethrowing pitcher from the farm. A rival in town, King Kenwood, the rich kid, in the little town, and a rivalry: nothing new or different about that story. My publisher liked it. The public liked it; it sold well, and I wrote two more in that series, and then for several years continued to write for young adults.

It was a very rich period, and I am no talking financially here, writing for young adults. I hadn’t imagined doing it, but to visit schools, to talk to teachers, and especially to see
young readers come up to me and ask questions – and, in particular, boys. We know in America that girls and women read more – we’re not saying they read better, but they read more – than men and boys. To have teachers say, “You see that boy over in the corner, Tom. He’s never read a whole book, until your book came along. He read your book. What an achievement, for Tom to do that.” I talked to Tom, not to turn him into a life-long reader, but maybe to tilt his direction just a little bit. That’s what teachers do, and that’s what authors can do, writing for young adults. I continue to write books for young adults and now have 12, the 13th book coming. I’ve moved away from baseball into other areas, a little bit of sci fi. One of my most popular is called Memory Boy. It’s about a great environmental collapse in which a suburban family has to pull together to survive – and by “pull together,” I mean get out of the suburb of Minneapolis and head up north, where they have a small lake cabin. It was fun to work with a suburban family who knew nothing about the land or hunting and find a way to give them those skills, to teach them those skills. It’s become my most popular young adult novel. There’s been some talk of a film version. That’s come and gone, but we’ll see. I have an idea that at some point, we’ll have a film adaptation.

Speaking of film adaptations, while I have been writing for young adults, my earlier works, short stories and novels, continue to find their way around, around the world. One of them, in particular, has been adapted into a very fine film, if I may say. The original story was called “A Gravestone Made of Wheat,” a story about a farmer who had made a promise to his wife that, when she died, he would bury her on the land. Times change, laws change, and upon her death, many, many years later, he finds he can’t keep that promise. He wanted to bury her on the farm that she loved, the land that she loved, but the sheriff said, “We can’t do it; it’s against the law.” So here we’re back to the dilemma, the moral dilemma: keep a promise or break the law. That’s what makes for a good story. And it was a good story. It turned into an even better movie. The movie’s name is Sweetland, an independent film that came out in 2006 and won many awards. I had only a small role in working with the screenplay, but the director, Ali Selim, consulted with me often, and we became very, very close. It was one of those relationships that is ideal, almost. He would call up and say, “We can have this scene or this scene; we can’t afford to have them both. Which one would you like?” I would say something like, “That’s like choosing among my children.” And he would laugh, but we would work it out. It won the best first feature award for an independent film, it has a very robust life out there on Netflix, and it was recently featured in a book called The 100 Best Movies You’ve Never Seen – very backhanded praise for Sweetland, but more and more people seem to be seeing it. It’s one of those films that truly seems to have legs, as they say in the industry. It just didn’t lie down and die. It’s still out there, very much alive and well.

Forward from there, while I continue to write, material is finding its way into other genres. The Sweetland movie now is in development for a musical by the same name. This amuses me greatly: to go from idea to short story to feature film to musical. I’m not sure what’s next for that little story. We shall see. The musical will be coming out of Minneapolis, with many of the Guthrie Theater people, with many of the fine singers and artists and lyricists here in the Twin Cities.
Publishing: MacMillan, Simon and Schuster, Harper Collins: those have been the
stalwarts of publishing for generations, from the get-go in American publishing, but they
too are puzzling through this new territory of e-books and e-reading. Most books now
will have both a print version and an e-version. The rise of Amazon, for example, has
allowed people to become writers when they may not have had an opportunity to be a
writer in the print world. In a nutshell, the old school world of print publishing worked
like this: you were a writer. You wrote alone, by yourself. When you finished a
manuscript, something that might be big enough to be a book, you sent it to a literary
agent. The literary agent’s job was to pass that manuscript on to a publisher. The agent in
the literary world is just like the agent in the real estate world. He or she makes a living
by getting a small percent of what he or she sells. It’s the job of that literary agent to
know someone in the publishing world, to know an editor at a publishing company, to
say, “I just read this story by this man or this woman in Minnesota or Wisconsin or
wherever, and I know you published something like it before that was successful. I think
you’d really like this book. I’m sending it to you.” And the editor would read that and
like it or not. Let’s say the editor liked it. The editor then would advocate for that project
within the publishing company. There are many editors within a publishing company.
The publishing company ideally would commit to make it a book. The author would get
paid. The process of book making then would begin, including lots of revision. Every
page of a published novel of mine is revised ten, 12, 15, maybe 20 times. It has to go
through that many revisions to get it to where it should be, that is, the best I can do as a
writer, and as error-free as possible.

Now, in the new world of e-publishing, it is possible for people to bypass all of that –
bypass the literary agent, bypass the publisher, to go directly from one’s laptop to an e-
book on Amazon.com. There are good things and, I say, bad things about this. It’s a good
thing that more people have opportunities to get their work out there, but there are also
some very incomplete e-books out there: very incompletely edited, very incompletely
revised. They are incompletely proofread or not proofread at all. There are lots of books
in e-versions, in short, that have not had any editing help, any professional hand in them.
This makes for a bad reading experience. The person who buys that book thinks, “Gee, I
just paid a dollar ninety nine, and it’s full of grammatical errors, and I don’t like the short
story part of it. I don’t like the characters. Why did I buy this book?” That can be a real
turn-off. The old world had a kind of filtering aspect to it. The agent would be that filter,
to winnow and separate out people who were not really ready to publish from those who
had made a commitment and had practiced and revised and revised and revised. The
agent would take the best of those and pass them on to publishers. Now the gates are
open, which is a good thing but has its downside as well. I do think there are great
opportunities in the new world of electronic publishing, particularly reading, and we see
this in the popularity of e-books which have now surpassed print books in terms of how
many are bought, print or e-version. I think this will continue.

I do think, however, that there is room for new things to happen in schools, in terms of e-
reading. I was in a school not long ago, a couple of schools, and I went into their library –
it was a small school in North Dakota – and there was that smell of old paper, of old
books. I had this sudden vision that this was the death-smell of books. I was smelling the
end of the book as print version. But later, I mentioned this to a trained librarian back in Minnesota and he said, “Well, clearly that school had a problem with moisture at some point, with humidity, and once that gets into your collection, it never goes away. That was the smell you were smelling.” I said, “That’s a relief.” He said, “Books are not dead.” Another school I was in recently, up in far northern Minnesota, a traditional 7th grade classroom: the students were all using iPads, which is common, “iPad schools,” I call them. And in the back were stacks of the big literature books, those oversized heavy ones. In fact, I weighed one recently, just to answer my own questions, and it weighed six pounds. We know parents complain about the weight of their kids’ backpacks when they come to go to school. Clearly, a six-pound book in our times now is not sustainable.

I’m on an exciting project. I’m working with some other authors, a cohort of young adult authors, and we’re trying to figure out a way to bring some of our best work, short stories, poems, essays, plays – to bring those directly to schools. Those works have gone through the professional process of editing and copy editing. They are proven. And much of the shorter work has gone to die in print. They are in various anthologies of short stories and plays. No one is buying those, even though teachers will sometimes email and say, “We found this short story of yours. Do you mind if we use it, photocopy it, scan it?” I always say, “Sure, go ahead, why not?” So we – these authors and myself – think there’s great opportunity to bring shorter work direct to schools. Maybe, we could add a lesson plan to that as well: do something good for teachers who have supported us all the years by buying our books and using them in their classes. This is a very exciting project. It allows us, these writers and myself, to have a foot both in the print world and in the new e-world, and to do something good for teachers. They are our heroes in some ways. That term is used loosely these days. Teachers, in my mind, there is no doubt, are heroes. They are working with young students who have tech skill and who are as distracted and pressed for time as any generation seems to be, from pop culture to electronic games to the internet and social media, our young generation has so many demands on their time. It’s up to teachers, and I would say, writers, to teach better and to write better, because I truly believe that, if we write well, we can capture and hold a young person’s attention. That’s the challenge, in this very modern time we see ourselves in.

Peter Shea: One feature of your biography I had missed before: you grew up on a dairy farm. I know dairy farms. I grew up with dairy farmers. I talk to them. It’s a different world. Those cows need attention. You can’t not milk them. It produces a different attitude. I wonder if you could say just a bit about those attitudes and ways of life and moral sensitivities that made sense in a rural environment and that are almost unimaginable once you leave the farm, the daily care of animals.

Will Weaver: I’ve talked about growing up on a farm and a dairy farm in particular. Cows require attention every day of the week. There are no days off. There are no weekends. The weekend, if you think about it, is a very urban concept, and certainly is not the case in farm country, particularly with dairy cows. In some ways, that experience shaped me. It gave me a routine, a steadiness. It embedded in me a work ethic. I write every day, and I try to get up early in the morning and do it. My wife jokes, “You still have that dairy farmer ethic inside you.” And I say, “Not a bad thing.” And she agrees
with me about that. But we can find that work ethic in other ways. I know a lot of young people who are deeply committed to sports. I would add music to that; I have a son who is a musician, and the number of hours he practices the routines is impressive, to say the least – the same with people who commit to sports: to run every day or to try to get ice time every day, if you’re a hockey player or a skater. Sports and music are good ways to find your way to that work ethic that truly is required to lift yourself up above everyone else who is doing it. I think, if it’s writing, if it’s music, if it’s sports: if you work harder than everyone else, you will succeed. You talents will find their way to the top. For me, it just happened to be that farm background; maybe for you it’s going to be some other way. But if we could find our way to a true routine, and, forward from there, I think success will follow. Indeed, for me, and I’ve said this to schools, and kids and even adults across the country: if we truly focus and commit to something we love, a career will follow. Again, if we follow what’s in our heart – maybe it’s writing, maybe it’s the violin, maybe it’s pottery: it could be any number of things – if we listen to that little voice inside ourselves, and feel that this is giving us pleasure, and then make that commitment to it, add that work ethic, then career and – who knows – maybe a good living will follow.

Peter Shea: I am fond of your story, “The Undeclared Major,” and I have spread that fondness to a lot of students. I think I have to represent them in asking a particular question. In “The Undeclared Major,” is asked, “What’s that all about; why does it matter? What are you going to become?” The answer in the story is, “Myself, only smarter.” That’s probably the best three-word sentence I have read. I think readers tumble to the fact that this is, to some extent, you. They want me to ask, “Is that how it turned out?”

Will Weaver: Yes. I have a story called “The Undeclared Major.” I mentioned being an undeclared major earlier. It seemed like a natural story to write, eventually: a close-to-home story, a personal story about going off to the university and becoming an English major by default. I just happened to like literature classes, history as well. And then eventually <I’m> going home and explaining with some trepidation to my father that I was going to become an English major. It’s a funny little scene. The father doesn’t quite understand what this is all about, and quizzes the son, me in this case, as to what can you do with this English major. My character says several things, “I could write. I could be a teacher.” And he kind of loses his way, and he fumbles an answer at the end, “I guess I would just be myself, only smarter” – a good line, as it turns out, because for kids who major in philosophy, humanities, music, and the arts, we have no serious skill-set that we take forward. We are extremely knowledgeable, but we are not scientists, we are not engineers. We don’t go directly into a company and work there. We are ourselves, but truly we are smarter – that is to say, more widely read, more insightful, more knowing about the world, and that serves us well. I remain convinced that we find ourselves some way better that way than <by> focusing on a really narrow set of skills while in college. For me, it did turn out well. The English major became the writer became the literary man became the film-maker and public speaker – maybe again proof that following your heart and becoming yourself, only a better self, will afford us a successful career down the road.
Peter Shea: You’ve had a parallel career to that of a writer, as a teacher, and so far that hasn’t come into our conversation except obliquely. Can you say a little bit about your teaching career and also what you’ve seen over the arc of that career – changes in how you’ve been with students or how students have been with you?

Will Weaver: I have been talking about my writing career but, at the same time, I should say that very few writers make a living just writing. I suggest they would fit into a very small room somewhere. The rest of us have to have a real job. That could be any number of things. Many, however, are teachers. That was my case. I taught 22 years at the State University in Bemidji. It was a very pleasing career: to be able to teach, to be able to write, to come and go. While you can have other jobs and be a writer, that certainly worked well for me. My students were very pleased at my success. They also knew I’d have to take off for a couple of days, to follow a book or do an appearance. They were always happy to hear about my trip when I came back, and I was always happy to spend extra time with them, to make up for those lost days. Teaching has changed dramatically, but fundamentally it remains the same. A teacher needs a relationship with the students, and the students need to see someone who not only knows the curriculum area, but might well be a person that they admire. I am not saying teachers need to be liked, but we look at adults, when we are younger, perhaps unconsciously, as models. We think, “I’d like to be that person,” or “Wow, I’d never want to be that person.” I think we sort through people unconsciously like this. So I think an important part of teaching is being a good model, a model of a person who is knowledgeable, patient, who is open, who is accessible. There is a whole list of characteristics, it seems to me, that make a good teacher, and I know that you have had teachers you liked and teachers who may not have been that successful for you. Teaching has been a wonderful career but, as my writing took off, and more and more demands hit me, I realized I had to make a choice. I never wanted to short-change my students, so I left teaching. I have been full time at my writing now for several years, and that’s as it should be.

The nice thing is that I visit schools across the country; that fulfills the need I have to meet students and be in a classroom and share everything I’ve learned. In terms of teaching, I think we have the better deal of it, because, when we teach, we always learn things, and that’s been the best part of my teaching career: all the stuff I’ve learned from the literature, the stories, reading them again as I work through them in a classroom, and seeing something I’d missed, and then hearing from the students, their insights, making me think of things I’ve never thought of before. That’s the great blessing of teaching.

Peter Shea: This turn to young adult fiction: I notice the titles and directions as the sorts of things that would appeal to middle school boys, high school boys, and I am wondering what you think literature can do for boys in the country.

Will Weaver: We’ve been talking about writing for young adults. My writing tips towards boys, perhaps naturally: the sports life, baseball novels, adventure in some ways, and recently an interesting trilogy of books: I called them my motor novels. Striking Out is a baseball novel, but these three are about stock car racing, small-town dirty track
racing. I set out with a particular agenda. I hardly ever do this, but I did with these books. I wanted to catch the attention of boys who love cars and hate their English classes. Teachers and librarians smile at that and say, “Yes, we have those boys in our classes.” I have this in my own background: hot-rodding, cars, ice racing, demolition derbies, and so on – a very traditional Midwestern background that I dusted off, brought forward, and wrote this series of three novels. It has been very pleasing to go around to schools and actually bring a racecar with me. I developed a racecar team to go along with these novels, had a young man drive it for me and then later a young woman. We would take the car and our motor novels and do school visits. There’s nothing not to like about a bright, loud racecar in the parking lot of a school. It was very pleasing to see it surrounded by boys, and talk cars, and talk stock car racing, and then say, “We have some books to go along with this. If you like cars, maybe you’d like these books,” – a very non-subtle approach, but a very successful one. We were greatly thanked by teachers who would say, “You know, Joe over there looking at your car: he’s never read a book, but I know he’s going to like these racing novels.”

And as a sidebar to this outreach for the motor novels, we have some interest from television, as a possible series. We’ll see how this turns out, if it turns out. Film interest comes and goes. It moves ahead for a while, and then someone gets fired or something changes in Hollywood and it dies. Then, it surges ahead again; someone else is hired, and likes the idea of these motor novels for television. I can say it’s moving ahead very nicely right now. I can’t say much more than that. We have a producer. We have an executive producer. We have a script. I have some hope that we will see this on television in the near future, but, again, as an author who’s been through this before with a couple of film adaptations, it’s never a film until you see it on the screen and get paid for it.

Peter Shea: I gave a friend a movie of one of his favorite books, O Pioneers. He watched it and said, “I don’t like it because what I see on the screen is replacing the text for me. It’s coming to be how I see it.” I am wondering if you see any conflict or tension or downside to having your work adapted for film?

Will Weaver: The matter of film adaptations is a very complicated one for the author. On the one hand, it’s a wonderful gift for the author that someone takes the work seriously enough to pay for it and make a film of it. On the other hand, there are always great changes that come with the territory of film adaptation. It’s a mixed blessing. There are truly gains and losses in a film adaptation. In the example of my story, “A Gravestone Made of Wheat,” which became Sweetland, <there were> quite a few changes, but the same heart of the story still beat in the film. My first novel, Red Earth, White Earth, became a CBS television movie and, as I said, not a very good one. A 400-page novel shrank, dehydrated into a 90-page television script. It was a very unhappy experience for me. So, one good one, one bad one: I am hoping the next one will be a successful adaptation. We read a book; we see a film adaptation. The film adaptation can replace what occurred in our minds as we read that story, sometimes in a good way, sometimes in a bad way. We often say, “Well, the book was better.” As a writer, I tend to agree with that, but there are some wonderful film adaptations. I couldn’t have been more pleased with my Sweetland adaptation. It became a different kind of story in some ways, but the
spirit remained. As writers, book writers, short-story writers, that’s the best we can hope for.

**Peter Shea:** You started out writing close to your experience, close to your own history. A lot of what you’ve done has stayed pretty close to things you knew intimately. Then there’s this part of the story about science fiction, about a novel set in the future. I’m curious about how you think of that move; is it continuous with what has been going on before or is it a right turn somehow?

**Will Weaver:** Much of my writing is drawn from my own life: small town, baseball, stock car racing, hunting – those stories. At some point, however, writers think to themselves, “I want to do something new and different. I want to change it up just a little bit, or maybe a whole lot.” In this case, *Memory Boy* was that book. I had written the three baseball novels for young adults, and a couple others, and I didn’t want to get pigeonholed as a sportswriter or a writer just for boys, so a little bit of sci-fi was a good thing. I think you’ll see this with other writers over the arc of their careers. They’re going along and the novels will be somewhat similar to each other, and then there will be one that’s sort of an outlier. You can just make that assumption, that the writer needed a change, needed a break, and wanted to make that move sideways, up or down, or backwards, just to shake things up a little bit. There’s nothing wrong with that, and it’s very refreshing. It’s a good feeling when that happens – maybe switching genres entirely. A serious writer may be writing a mystery. We can almost see what’s going on in that writer’s career, that it was time for a break. So that’s fun to look at, as we look at writers over the whole of their career.

**Peter Shea:** I’ve been following with great attention Nautilus Theater Company’s long project of adapting stories by Sherwood Anderson into an opera. I’m suspecting that adaptation for opera, for musical theater, is a different process, and in some ways a more intense process, than working with film adaptations. You seem to be at the beginning of one of those projects. I am wondering if you have any thoughts about that enterprise.

**Will Weaver:** The matter of adaptations from print works, from novels and short stories: the most obvious one is the film adaptation. There are radio adaptations. There are stage adaptations; I’ve had a couple of those, several of those, in fact – short stories presented on radio. The matter of the musical or the opera is a very interesting transition. *Sweetland* is headed that way, and I am not really involved in this production, in the music, but I have only high hopes for it. There are creative people involved, and, if one can get a successful film adaptation, why not a singing and dancing adaptation? From the authors’ point of view: we have to feel pleased that someone has taken our work seriously enough to adapt it. We have to respect the skills and talents of the people involved, be they film people or radio or stage <people> or opera <people>, and help them as we can, but, in the end, let them do their thing. I think this is the best approach to take for authors: to be happy and pleased to be honored by the adaptation, and cross one’s fingers and hope for the best.